

FRANK READE



WEEKLY MAGAZINE,

Containing Stories of Adventures on Land, Sea & in the Air.

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No. 4.

NEW YORK, NOVEMBER 21, 1902.

Price 5 Cents.

FRANK READE, JR.'S ELECTRIC AIR CANOE; OR, THE SEARCH FOR THE VALLEY OF DIAMONDS.

By "NONAME."



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Frank Reade, Jr.'s Electric Air Canoe

OR,

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CHAPTER I.

WHICH DESCRIBES THE NEW INVENTION.

Deep in the heart of a picturesque range of hills lay the beautiful little city of Readestown.

The founder of the place, Frank Reade, had gained a world-wide reputation as an inventor.

His inventions were many and varied, and had netted him an immense fortune.

At a ripe old age he had retired from the field, and had been succeeded by his son, Frank Reade, Jr.

The latter was a slender, handsome youth, with remarkably intelligent features and scarcely less inventive genius than his father, as time revealed.

Frank Reade, Jr., moreover, as is the case with rising genius, had developed a broader scope of talent, and soon had astonished the country.

One day the startling announcement went abroad that Frank Reade, Jr., had just completed his new and wonderful airship, the "Electric Air Canoe."

The report spread far and wide, and one morning a reporter of the Associated Press presented himself at the Reade Iron Works.

"Is it true, Mr. Reade, that you have just completed your Air Canoe?" asked the scribe, bluntly.

"It is," replied the young inventor, modestly. "If you will step into the yard I will be pleased to show it to you."

The reporter complied with alacrity.

He gazed about him, not a little surprised at the magnitude of the workshops and iron foundries, which were exclusively employed in the manufacture of the various inventions of Frank Reade, Jr.

They passed on across the yard, and halted before the door of a large, high-roofed building.

Frank Reade, Jr., tapped lightly on the door.

Instantly a voice in a rich, Irish brogue sounded within.

"Phwat will yez have, anyway?"

"It is me, Barney," said the young inventor authoritatively.

"All roight, sor."

The door swung back, and a thick-set Irishman, with a comical mug and merry blue eyes stood in the doorway.

"Barney," said Frank, brusquely. "I wish to show this gentleman the Electric Air Canoe. Where is Pomp?"

"Shure, sor, the naygur do be over yonder, shining up that brasswork."

Frank saw a fat, comical-looking ducky, as black as the ace of spades, engaged in scouring some brasswork on the Air Canoe.

"All right, Barney," said the young inventor. "I want you to stay right here and watch the door until we come back."

"All roight, sor."

Then Frank quickly crossed a platform to the spot where the ducky was.

Pomp instantly dropped his scouring utensils and made a low bow.

"I'se berry glad to see yo', Marse Frank," he cried. "Am yo' cum fo' to see de Air Canoe?"

"I have," replied Frank. "And I want you to accompany us over the vessel. Do you understand?"

"A'right, sah!"

The ducky, with a pleased grin, proceeded to obey orders.

These two eccentric characters, the Irishman and the ducky, for such they were, had been many years in the employ of the Reades, father and son.

Upon all their famous jaunts over the world, the inventor had taken the two faithful servitors.

So long had then been in the employ of the inventors, that both had become expert machinists and electricians.

"Behold the Air Canoe!" said Frank Reade, Jr., with a sweep of his hand.

The reporter was spellbound with the wonderful sight.

He saw what was certainly the most wonderful machine that he had come across for many a day.

The Electric Air Canoe, as its name would imply, was modeled something in the shape of a canoe.

The bow was round and canoe-shaped, and the whole body of the vessel had the appearance of great lightness and buoyancy.

The deck was some fourteen feet in width, and the length of the canoe fully one hundred feet.

This gave much room and allowed for a deck-house or cabin of circular shape, which was in the center of the deck.

In one part of this cabin were the electric dynamos and the wonderful machinery which furnished speed to the propeller and the suspensory rotascopes.

These latter were three in number, of large dimensions and great power.

The largest one was in the center of the boat, the shaft extending upward through the roof of the center cabin or deck-house.

The other two were at opposite ends, and here the shaft of each extended through the roof of a smaller deck-house. In each deck-house was a dynamo.

So that each rotascope was operated by a different dynamo.

"The reason of that," said Frank, explanatively, "is for safety and also to economize power. Any one of these suspensory rotascopes would support the airship, but each is called upon to do its proportionate amount. In case one dynamo failed the ship would not fall!"

"A wise precaution!" acknowledged the scribe.

Also a separate dynamo was employed to work the propeller.

This made four dynamos aboard the Air Canoe.

The main body of the canoe was made of hollow cylinders. This gave buoyancy as well as dimension to the craft.

The deck was spacious and inclosed with a guard-rail which ran all the way around the vessel.

In the canoe-shaped bow was a port-hole, and through this was thrust a gun, which fired dynamite projectiles, also the invention of Frank Reade, Jr.

Altogether, the Air Canoe was a trim, neat and handsome craft, as buoyant and light as a feather.

The reporter had kept his note-book in his hand, and had been busy making notes.

They entered the cabin now.

It was an elegantly furnished room. There were rich hangings, costly inlaid floor, luxurious furniture, and two handsome staterooms, with elegant bunks.

Scientific instruments and a few articles of vertu hung upon the walls or rested on shelves.

Frank motioned the reporter to a seat at a table, and said:

"Well, what do you think of the Air Canoe?"

"Wonderful," averred the scribe, with a long-drawn breath. "Nothing on earth can equal it. Yet it does not seem possible that this vessel can really fly."

"It is not only possible, but certain," replied Frank.

"I should like to experience the novelty."

"You shall have the chance."

The reporter shrugged his shoulders.

"The earth is good enough for me," he averred. "I think I will back out."

"But I can assure you that there is no risk whatever!" declared Frank. "You are perfectly safe."

"Not to-day," laughed the scribe. "But, by the way, Mr. Reade, what will be the object of your first trip?"

Frank Reade, Jr., arose.

He crossed the room to a small glass cabinet, unlocked the door and took out a bundle of charts.

These he threw upon the table.

"Do you see that?" he cried. "Well, that is the map of Brazil."

"I see," replied the reporter. "Is that your objective point?"

"But, study the chart a bit," said Frank. "Do you see, here is the headwaters of the Amazon?"

"Yes."

"Well, here is a tributary, and it rises in a peculiar country."

"Well?"

"Explorers have returned from this country with wonderful stories. It is said that savage and warlike tribes abound there, and that it is more than a white man's life is worth to venture down there."

"Indeed!"

"Worse than all else are the huge pythons which infest the forests, the gorillas and pumas, which are of the wildest and fiercest."

"I declare! A good place to keep away from."

"Do you think so?"

"Yes."

"Well, that is where I am going with the Air Canoe!"

The reporter looked startled.

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes; I do."

"But——"

"I know what you would say. You want to know why I go there?"

"You have guessed right."

"Well, I will tell you," said Frank slowly. "It is quite a story."

The reporter brightened up.

"That is just what I want," he said. "Something exciting!"

"I have no doubt you will consider it an exciting topic. I will put my finger upon a certain spot on the map. Do you see it?"

"Yes."

"Well, there is a most wonderful valley in the center of this perilous region. Out of a party of one hundred and twenty-five armed explorers only one lived to escape from that valley and to reach Rio Janeiro, and tell his wonderful story."

"Ah!"

"He gave a wonderful account of their adventures. He said that that valley was literally strewn with diamonds in the rough. They abounded as common pebbles in the bed of the river, were studded in the mountain wall and could be found in the auriferous soil by digging anywhere!"

"A valley of diamonds!" gasped the reporter.

"That is it precisely. He brought back three huge stones,

which for brilliancy are truly wonderful. They made him rich!"

"Heavens! What a chance. Of course, he will go back with a larger party?"

"Nothing would hire him to go back. Neither has any one the hardihood to attempt the feat after listening to his tale."

"But you think of going?"

"True; but I shall not have to thread on foot two thousand miles of dense forest peopled with a million perils. With the Air Canoe I shall be able to defy the perils of the wonderful Valley of Diamonds."

CHAPTER II.

THE STRANGE BALLOON.

The scribe sat like one in a daze for some moments.

Then he heaved a deep sigh.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed, "I wish I had the courage to venture to go with you. As it is I can only embrace this excellent material for a story. Of course, you will find no trouble in reaching the Valley of Diamonds?"

"On the contrary, I expect considerable difficulty," said Frank, rising. "But I mean to surmount it."

"I have no doubt you will. All the civilized world will be agape to learn how you succeed in your purpose."

They left the yard, and a few moments later Frank took leave of his visitor.

Then he returned to the building, and said to Barney:

"Now, Barney, I want you to have all stores aboard tomorrow morning and ready for the start."

"All roight, sor."

"You'll attend to it?"

"If he don', I will, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp, putting his head out of a window.

"Shut up, ye African misfit!" shouted Barney, angrily. "Whoever asked yez advice, anyway?"

Frank had now passed out of the yard.

Pomp had merely spoken to irritate Barney. The two were ever playing "roots" upon each other with varying success.

Barney now saw a chance to get even with Pomp for a joke of which he had been the victim the day before.

Pomp's head was still thrust through the window.

He was gaping after Frank, and did not heed Barney.

It was the Celt's opportunity.

Quick as a flash he reached down and caught up a pail of whitewash, which sat upon the steps.

He was a trifle higher up than Pomp, and this aided him.

With skilled hand Barney swung the bucket up and let its contents drive right at Pomp's woolly head.

The result was laughable.

The darky looked like a whitened post, and drew his head in with a sputtering yell.

Undoubtedly for a moment Pomp thought an avalanche had struck him.

He was transformed in that swift moment of time from an ebony African into a queer looking white man.

"Golly—golly! I'se killed! I'se jes' done fo'—clar done fo', an' I'se a dead niggah dis berry minnit!" howled the darky, wildly, as he danced like a dervish and clawed his face and head like a maniac.

It did not require much time for him thus to scrape off enough of the whitewash, so that his identity was made plainer.

Then a madder darky never lived when he realized the truth.

The shrieks of laughter in which Barney was indulging assured him of this.

"Fo' de good Lor'!" he sputtered. "I done believe it am de wo'k ob dat I'ish loafah. I jes' break his jaw fo' him or I nebber lib to see anoder day!"

With this he rushed after the Celt.

But Barney was too wary to be caught napping thus.

He quickly got out of the way, and Pomp was unable to find him.

That sable gentleman finally gave up the quest, and went away to clean himself up, but muttering vengeance upon the author of his misery.

"Fo' de Lor', I git squar wif dat I'ishman if I hab to live a hunderd year!" he declared, resolutely. "I jes' fix up one fo' him."

And Pomp was just the sort to keep his word.

The next morning great preparations were going on in the yard of the Reade works.

All was hustle and excitement.

This was the day the Electric Air Canoe was to sail.

The canoe had been bought out of the shop and rested upon stagings in the yard.

Hundreds of people had already begun to gather about the works to see the ascension.

The excitement and interest was of the most intense sort.

An hour later a cheering crowd saw Frank Reade, Jr., with a number of the prominent citizens, enter the yard.

A sort of ovation was given the young inventor in honor of his departure.

The band played, salutes were fired and cheers given.

Barney and Pomp were already aboard the Air Canoe.

Barney was in the pilot-house with his hand upon the lever which was to set the rotascopes in motion.

He waited only for the signal.

Frank Reade, Jr., now lifted his hat to the crowd and stepped over the rail.

He motioned to Barney.

Down went the lever, there was a whirring of machinery, the hissing of the rotascopes, the air-ship trembled for an instant, and then leaped into space.

A mad yell went up from the crowd, cannons boomed, and Frank Reade, Jr., fired a dynamite projectile from his gun, which exploded in mid-air.

Then the Electric Air Canoe set a course to the southward, and half an hour later Readestown had entirely gone from view.

The great journey was begun.

The Air Canoe was sailing like a bird through the air.

Frank Reade, Jr., with a thrill of pardonable pride, saw that his invention was a wonderful success.

"There is now no reason why we should not find that Valley of Diamonds," he declared, confidently.

"Be jabbers, we'll thry," declared Barney. "On me worrud, Misther Frank, phwat wud yez call that?"

The Celt had suddenly caught sight of an object in the air just ahead not more than two miles.

It had shot into view from the depths of a fleecy cloud.

"A balloon!" gasped the young inventor, with amazement.

"Shure, an' it is that, sor!" cried Barney, excitedly.

"It is coming this way!"

Frank sprang into the cabin and procured his glass.

Emerging, he brought it to bear upon the distant balloon.

There was no doubt but that an air current was bringing the balloon toward them.

"Shure, can yez see anybody in the basket?" asked Barney.

"Yes," replied Frank. "And—my God! See—they are fighting!"

Indeed, even at that distance two men could be seen engaged in a deadly struggle.

One had forced the other to the edge of the basket.

He seemed trying hard to throw him out. But the struggle was maintained with deadly force.

The balloon rocked and swayed in a frightful manner.

"Fools," gasped Frank, in horror. "Don't they know that they are in awful peril?"

Whether they knew it or not, the two men continued to struggle fiercely.

Frank remained inactive no longer.

"Head the Canoe for the balloon," he said to Barney.

The Celt quickly changed the course of the Air Canoe.

The balloon speedily drew nearer. The two miles were covered very quickly.

It could then be easily seen that the struggle in the basket was one of deadly sort.

The balloon was exactly on a line with the air-ship.

Frank Reade, Jr., knew that it would never do for the balloon and the air-ship to meet.

There was no doubt but that the rigging of the balloon would catch in the rotascopes or rigging of the air-ship, and the result would be serious.

So Frank directed Barney to elevate the air-ship so that it would float a hundred feet or more over the balloon.

The struggle between the two occupants of the basket was going on fiercely.

Frank Reade, Jr., was in a quandary.

What was to be done?

Surely if the struggle was permitted to go on murder would be the result.

Yet the occupants of the Air Canoe seemed powerless.

"Shur, sor, phwativer wud yez do about it?" cried Barney.

"Mercy on us! I do not know," replied Frank.

"Golly! I done fink dey kill each odder fo' suah!" cried Pomp.

Frank was like one insane.

He walked up and down the deck, shouting frantically to the two men to desist.

"Cease your foolish quarrel!" he shouted. "Don't you know that it will be the death of you?"

But he might as well have talked to empty air.

One of the men, however, looked up and saw the air-ship.

There was an expression of mingled astonishment and relief upon his face.

Then suddenly, with what seemed a renewal of super-human strength, he forced his antagonist back and dealt him a blow which laid him insensible in the bottom of the basket.

The deadly struggle was over.

Panting and exhausted the victor for a moment leaned over the edge of the basket.

"Hello, down there!" shouted Frank Reade, Jr. "What on earth ails you?"

The survivor of the combat looked up and made a gesture.

"Hello!" he replied, faintly. "Who are you?"

"I am Frank Reade, Jr."

"The inventor of flying machines?"

"Yes."

"I have heard of you. Heaven be praised; you have come in time to save me."

"What is the matter with you?"

"I have been in the clutches of a maniac for the last twelve hours. Oh, God! I could not have stood it much longer."

"A maniac?"

"Yes; but if you will rescue me from this perilous position, I will tell you all about it."

"I will try."

Frank Reade, Jr., turned to Pomp.

"Bring me out that long rope ladder," he ordered.

Pomp hastened to obey.

In a few moments he came out of the cabin with the article in question.

It was a very light, but strong, rope ladder, fully two hundred feet in length.

Pomp hastened to the rail and threw it over.

Down it fell beside the balloon.

The occupant of the car was eagerly watching for it.

"Hold firm!" shouted Frank. "We shall have to ask you to climb up on this ladder, as we fear collision with the balloon."

"All right," replied the balloonist; "but you will have to hurry as I can see a seam opening in the balloon now."

"All right!"

Frank made an effort to sway the ladder over within reach of the balloonist, but at that moment there was a tremendous report, the vast globe collapsed, and shot downward like a meteor.

CHAPTER III.

RESCUED.

A more awful development could hardly have been imagined.

A great cry of horror went up from Frank Reade, Jr., and Barney and Pomp.

"My God! They have gone down to death!" cried Frank, in agony.

"Fo' suah, it am de las' ob dem!" wailed Pomp.

"Begorra, it's the ind av thim!" averred Barney.

All crowded to the rail of the Air Canoe to watch the downward course of the fated balloon.

It was a dizzy height.

The earth seemed miles away, and objects there were dim and vague.

The balloon was traveling downward like a meteor.

Those on board the Air Canoe had expected to see it strike the earth with a mighty rebound.

Such a thing would, of course, have settled the fate of those in the basket.

But now a great cry went up from Barney.

"Be jabers, wud yez see the wather!" he cried; "they'll hit it for shure!"

Directly beneath the descending balloon was a large lake.

That the balloon would strike in about its center Frank was assured.

In an instant hope dawned in the young inventor's breast.

He knew that it was a good chance for the aeronauts to escape death if they should strike the bosom of the lake.

If they were good swimmers and the maniac recovered his senses there was a chance for them.

Frank turned to Barney.

"Down—down!" he cried. "Reverse the lever on the switchboard! Quickly!"

"All roight, sor."

Into the pilot-house sprang Barney.

The Celt turned the lever in question, and downward darted the air-ship.

Of course, it was impossible to overtake the balloon.

This had already struck the surface of the lake.

The silk envelope was spread out upon the water, and a great cry went up from watching Pomp.

"Fo' de Lor', Marse Frank," cried the darky, "dey am bo'f ob dem swimmin' fo' all dey is wuff!"

This was true.

There were two forms in the water below, and they were struggling to keep afloat.

The lake was large, and there was no possibility that they might swim to the shore.

There was no time to lose.

"Down—down faster, Barney!" cried Frank, excitedly.

But the Celt needed no urging.

The air-ship was now but three hundred feet above the water.

Another hundred feet and the rope ladder dangled in the water.

The two swimmers saw it and made for it.

The next moment both were drawn on board, not much the worse for their involuntary bath.

The maniac seemed as intelligent and lucid as his companion.

"God be praised, we are saved!" he cried.

And then he passed his hand across his forehead, gazing about him in a dazed way.

"But what is all this?" he exclaimed, vaguely. "Am I dreaming, or is it reality?"

"It is reality, Henry Haines," said his companion, gripping his hand. "Poor fellow, you have been through a good deal. You probably are not aware of the fact that you were temporarily a madman up there in the air, and came near taking my life!"

"My God! Do not tell me that," groaned the restored madman.

"It is true. If I hadn't rapped you on the head pretty hard you would have thrown me out of the balloon!"

"God forgive me! I have no recollection of it, Allan Gray. It must have been the rarified air and the pressure up there!"

"That was it," replied Allan Gray; "but we have escaped, so let us congratulate ourselves. I think this will end our ballooning experiences."

"God grant it may!"

Frank Reade, Jr., had listened with interest, and now understood all.

He knew that the pressure upon the brain in upper air stratum very often caused temporary aberration of the mind.

This, no doubt, was what had overtaken Henry Haines, the aeronaut.

He was once more himself, however, as could be plainly seen.

"Then your companion is not a confirmed madman?" asked Frank, as he shook hands with Gray.

"Oh, no," replied the younger aeronaut. "You understand how it was. But I beg pardon. Allow me to introduce myself. I am Allan Gray, Professor of Latin and Greek in the Western University of Ethics and Science. This is my co-laborer, Dr. Henry Haines."

"I am glad to meet you, gentlemen," said Frank, warmly. "Need I introduce myself?"

"We have heard of you, and are well acquainted with your fame as an inventor," declared Gray, cordially. "But I promised to tell you how we happened in our flight up there so far!"

"Very good," agreed Frank.

"The balloon is of our own construction. We have long had in mind this ascension, as we desired much to know the effect of the upper atmosphere upon certain chemicals which we had hoped to perfect in such manner as to improve upon our present style of barometers. We were succeeding fairly well, when the valve rope broke and we were unable to descend. Then Haines went mad. You know the rest."

"I think you may congratulate yourselves upon a fortunate escape," said Frank.

"Indeed we may; and we owe the preservation of our lives to you."

"I am glad to have been able to serve you," said Frank, modestly.

"But what a wonderful invention this is! Truly you are a genius, Mr. Reade. In fact, I may safely say, the genius of the age."

Frank blushed confusedly at such a direct compliment as this.

He proceeded at once to show his visitors over the air-ship.

The two scientists were delighted.

They declared the Air Canoe the most wonderful of modern inventions.

"Now, gentlemen," said Frank, pleasantly, "where shall I drop you?"

"If I were allowed to follow my own inclination," said Gray, "I should beg of you to allow us to travel with you on this wonderful voyage in quest of the Valley of Diamonds."

"I fear that would be impossible," said Frank, politely.

"Oh, of course! But we wish you success, Mr. Reade."

"Thank you."

"As for that—you may drop us at Stirling, a village at the other end of this lake. We can make our way home easily from there."

"Very well."

A short while later the Air Canoe descended in the vicinity of the small town named, and leave was taken of the scientists.

Once more the Air Canoe shot upward and took its southward course.

No other aeronauts were encountered, and in two days' time Pomp sighted the Gulf of Mexico.

Some hours later they were above this vast body of water.

Straight to the southward the air-ship kept, passing over certain islands of the West Indies.

Then one day land was sighted, which Frank declared to be the coast of Venezuela.

The air-ship was here allowed to descend nearer the earth.

The rocky coast was revealed, with its shores rich with tropical verdure.

The heat was intense, and the voyagers had all donned white linen suits and cork hats.

Frank took his bearings, and calculated that they were not far from the mouth of the Orinoco River.

As they were so near the estuary of the great river it was decided to visit it.

Accordingly the air-ship was headed a little to the east, and the coast was followed for one hundred miles or more.

Then the next morning Barney first sighted the mouth of the mighty river so near the equator.

A wonderful sight was spread before the gaze of our voyagers.

The delta of the Orinoco presented a scene of impressive grandeur.

Divided into a thousand streams the great river here waters a vast territory, back of which the scenery is as wild and grand as any human mind could conceive.

The air-ship was now headed inland.

Several large towns were passed over, and in one of these there was a large fort.

From this cannon shots were fired upward at the Air Canoe.

But at that height our voyagers could laugh at this.

From what could be seen of the people below, they seemed to have been thrown into a state of the greatest excitement.

There was no doubt but that the appearance of the air-ship had a superstitious effect upon them.

Frank did not retaliate, for he had no desire to shed human blood.

With his dynamite projectiles he could have blown the town to atoms, but he did not think of such a thing.

The air-ship passed on over mighty plantations where negro slaves were at work in gangs.

On for a whole day the Air Canoe swiftly sailed.

Then civilization was left behind, and a country wilder than the human imagination could picture was encountered.

The country now became more hilly and waterfalls became frequent.

At times small native settlements were seen in the woods below.

The air-ship was sailing over the surface of the river when a thrilling incident occurred.

Across the river, at an angle where it was not very wide, a rope bridge was stretched.

The ropes were manufactured of a kind of fiber or vine which grows in the forest, and are very strong and durable.

Often the South American natives bridge the deepest chasms of most dangerous streams with these ropes.

At sight of the rope bridge Barney gave a sharp cry.

"Shure, wud yez luk at the bridge av ropes!" he cried; "that's foin worruk, to be shure."

"You are right!" cried Frank. "But, ah—look at that."

A native, half naked, had started to cross the rope.

It was a female, and she was half way across when she chanced to look up and see the air-ship.

A yell of terror escaped her lips, and she went off the bridge like a flash.

Down into the water she went with a great splash.

But this was not all.

The moment she struck the water, from the shores about there started a myriad savage alligators, all eager for a meal.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WHITE EXILE.

The fall of the native woman into the water was a matter of little consequence.

She could have swam double that distance to shore.

But in the treacherous waters of the river, with the alligators all about her, her fate seemed sealed.

"Begorra, it's eaten up she'll be!" cried Barney.

"Golly, you're right!" cried Pomp.

"She must be saved," declared Frank, with rigid face. "Barney, down with the rope ladder. Lively! Pomp, you steady the ship."

Barney needed no further bidding.

The way he put the rope ladder over the rail was wonderful.

Frank Reade, Jr., sprang to the dynamite gun in the bow.

The native woman had crawled upon a rock, but she was by no means out of the way of the alligators, who were coming for her full tilt.

Frank pulled back the air-valve of the pneumatic gun and set a projectile in the breech.

He took careful aim at a mass of the alligators, and pulled the lever.

The next moment the projectile struck the water and raised a column fifty feet in height.

Half a dozen dead alligators lay belly upward in the water.

Quick as a flash Frank turned the gun in another direction and fired.

The effect was the same.

It was a slaughter of saurians.

The water was red with blood and the bodies of the alligators floated everywhere.

Meanwhile, Barney had gone down the rope ladder like a monkey.

He reached down and threw one arm about the terrified native woman.

"Shure, av yez will help yersilf a bit we'll soon git yez out av this scrape," cried the Celt.

But the native woman was too terrified to heed what was said to her, nor could she have understood Barney if she had.

But Barney lifted her in his powerful arms and yelled to Pomp.

The ducky started the Air Canoe forward, and in this manner Barney and his charge were swung across the bosom of the river to the land.

Here the Celt dropped his load and himself upon the ground.

But the native woman at once fell upon her face before her rescuer in the most abject manner.

"Be jabbers, yez needn't do that," cried the Celt, humorously. "Shure it's not perlite in ye to throw yesilf at a gintleman's feet. The leddies in our counthry don't do that. It's the other way, begorra."

But the native woman evidently believed her captor a deity, and was bound to pay him homage.

Frank from the deck saw the situation.

He laughed in amusement.

"Now is your chance, Barney!" he cried. "Why don't you catch on?"

"Shure an' I might av if I wasn't a married man," cried the Celt. "Shure, it's not ivery man can have the ladies worship him."

Frank came down the ladder with this, Pomp meanwhile lowering the Air Canoe.

But no sooner had the young inventor's feet touched the ground when a startling thing happened.

From the undergrowth about a full score of uncouth natives leaped out.

They were armed to the teeth.

But at sight of the air-ship they all fell upon their faces.

"Begorra, it's a very polite lot av haythins they be, to be sure," cried Barney. "Mebbe it's their way av gettin' acquainted."

"No doubt," said Frank, with a laugh.

Finally, one of the natives, evidently the chief of the tribe, arose, and ventured to approach Frank.

He was a white-haired, patriarchal-looking old fellow, and wore a huge embroidered belt of python's skin.

He jabbered away for a few moments, and then began sign talk.

As near as possible Frank learned from him that they were at the moment in the heart of a dangerous country, and that there were hostile tribes near.

"Well," said Frank to Barney, after a while, "we can gain nothing by staying here. Let us get out!"

"All roight, sor."

Barney had turned to go aboard the air-ship.

But at that moment a startling thing happened.

There came from the woods a wild cry, and into the open sprang a man.

At first the voyagers took him for one of the natives.

He was dressed just the same, and his skin exposed for so long to the tropical sun was of nearly the same color.

But that he was a white man, and an American, was quickly known.

Long matted hair fell down upon his shoulders, and a beard upon his breast.

He rushed up to Frank, crying wildly:

"One of my own countrymen. God be praised! How glad I am to see you!"

"Heavens!" gasped Frank. "Who are you?"

"Well may you ask that question!" cried the nomad. "I have nigh lost my identity in all these years!"

"You are a white man?"

"Yes; and a native of New York. Are you an American?"

"I am."

"I knew it. My name is Jasper White. I was once a man of wealth in New York City."

"But—what are you doing here?" asked Frank, in amazement.

"Ah, that is a sad story. I did not stay here and adopt this life of my own free will."

"Indeed?"

"Eighteen years ago I invested my fortune in a mine in British Guiana. I came down here to look it up, found that I had been victimized, and was a ruined man."

The stranger covered his face with his hands and wept. Finally he continued:

"I also learned that my wife had proven false to me, and had eloped with the man who had effected my ruin. For a time I was almost a maniac."

"That was hard," agreed Frank.

"I cursed them both, and if I could have got back to America then, I think I would have killed them. But I could not. I had no money, nor could I borrow, beg or steal in this accursed land.

"Well, after a time I tried to forget it, and I drifted into the woods. One day our party was set upon by natives, and all were killed but me.

"My life was interceded for by the chief's daughter. I was taken into the tribe, she became my wife according to their forms, and here I am.

"Eighteen years I have lived in the same manner as primitive man. You are the first of my people whom I have seen in that time."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Frank, who had been deeply interested in the tale. "Yours was a sad experience."

"You will agree to that?"

"Yes."

"But it seems a blessing divine to look upon my kind again."

"I presume you are anxious to get back to America?"

"No."

The stranger's face wore a sad and sorrowful expression. His breast heaved with emotion.

"I will agree to put you in the way to get back," declared Frank.

"No," said the stranger, firmly. "I have no desire to go back."

"No desire?"

"No."

"Pray, why not?"

"It is easy to see. If I go back to America I will have no money, no friends. My former friends are dead or lost to me. My wife is gone, my home, my all."

He paused, and then continued with great bitterness:

"You can see that I would be a more miserable wretch there than here."

Frank nodded his head.

"Perhaps you are right."

"I know that I am. What is more, my native wife has been true and loving to me. In a measure I have educated her and brought her much to my level. We have pretty children and our primitive home is happy."

The recluse stepped forward and gripped Frank's hand.

"I thank you kindly," he said, "but you can see why I do not care to go back!"

"I do," replied Frank, heartily. "And I think you may be right. At any rate, I wish you all success."

"I thank you."

After that the conversation turned upon other topics.

Jasper White, the recluse, was wholly astounded when the Air Canoe was shown him.

"I can remember the wonders of the steamship and the railroad," he declared, "but I never expected to see this problem of sailing in the air solved."

"Well, you see it now," said Frank, pleasantly. "If you see fit to leave your home here I will take you to the nearest seaport."

"No; I will stay here."

The natives, under the influence of their white chief, now ventured to come nearer the air-ship.

They, indeed, became quite social, and even went so far as to bring presents of nuts and a tiger skin to Frank.

In return they received some articles of steel and some old garments, which delighted them greatly.

When it was generally known that the voyagers had saved one of their women from the alligators, the natives were more than ever friendly.

The sight of the score or more of dead alligators in the river was a thrilling one to the natives.

It seemed to give Jasper White an idea.

He advanced to Frank's side.

"I wish we might secure your co-operation in a little matter," he said.

"What is it?" asked Frank.

"There is a tiger of the man-eating species which has troubled us for a year past. He has caused the death of fully a dozen of our people."

"Indeed!"

"If you could help us to hunt him down, we will pay you in any way within our power."

"I will do that with pleasure," replied Frank, readily.

"Thank you a thousand times!"

Barney and Pomp were delighted with the idea of a tiger hunt.

It promised excitement of the most intense kind, and this was vastly to their liking.

Jasper White led the way through a leafy screen of forest to the native village.

Here a curious scene was spread out to the gaze of the voyagers. It was much to the edification of Barney and Pomp.

CHAPTER V.

TAMING THE TIGER.

The native village embraced half a hundred conical shaped huts.

They were made of palmetto leaves intertwined and framed, and were absolutely impervious to water.

The native women were collected for a dance in honor of the visitors.

These were in the main comely, and the curious dance was not ungraceful and quite amusing.

Then the chief's guests were invited to participate in a feast.

This consisted much of game, wild fruits and yams.

An appetizing drink made from a peculiar plant found in the forest was indulged in.

All this ceremony over with, the tiger hunt was broached.

The air-ship was brought down into the village.

Arrangements were quickly made.

It was known to a certainty where the tiger's lair was.

This was in a deep jungle, not far from the village.

It was planned that a score of the natives would beat the jungle, armed with torches to defend themselves.

There was no doubt but that the tiger would come forth.

The air-ship would hover over the jungle, and at sight of the tiger Frank would annihilate it with one of his dynamite projectiles.

The pneumatic gun was trained and ready.

Frank and Barney and Pomp, with Jasper White, were on board.

The air-ship went up one hundred feet, and started for the jungle.

The sensation of sailing in the air was an exciting one to Jasper.

He was for a time wholly carried away with the novelty.

But exciting incidents were close at hand.

The air-ship now hung over the jungle, and Jasper pointed out the spot where the beast had its lair.

Beaten paths were seen in the jungle, leading in all directions.

These, it was declared, had been made by the brute.

The jungle had always been a resort of terror to the natives.

It could be seen that the natives were already encircling the jungle and beginning to beat the grass.

But Frank Reade, Jr., did not feel disposed to wait for all this business.

The young inventor conceived a better and more expeditious idea.

"Well, my friend," he said to White, "you believe that the beast is in that jungle, do you?"

"Yes, sir," replied White.

"All right."

"What are you going to do?"

"Scare him out."

"How?"

"I will show you."

"But I would pray you wait. My men will soon succeed in that."

"I haven't the slightest doubt of that," replied Frank, "but I know a quicker way."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Ah, well, I have nothing to say."

Frank advanced to the bow of the Canoe and trained the gun upon the thick clump, believed to be the lair of the man-eater.

Then he sent a projectile down into the place.

There was a terrific explosion.

The result was wonderful.

Earth, stones, grass and debris flew up into the air to a great height.

The noise of the explosion had hardly died out when

there was a terrible roar, and out in the open part of the jungle there leaped a magnificent specimen of the South American tiger.

He was a monster of his species.

There he stood, lashing his tail and glaring up at the air-ship with a wicked light in his eyes.

"Whew!" cried Frank. "He is a big fellow, in't he?"

"Didn't I tell you so."

"You're right!"

"Begorra, I'll take me 'davy that Barnum niver had the loikes av him in his big menagery!" cried Barney.

"Huh!" sniffed Pomp. "Didn't yo' eber see a tiger outside ob Barnum's, afo', yo' big fool I'ishman!"

"Be jabbers, it's a fool yez call me, eh?" spluttered Barney, making a pass at the darky.

"Dat am what yo' am."

"I'll have yer hide fer that, naygur!"

Barney and Pomp would have had a scrap then and there, but Frank stopped it.

There was too much other fun ahead now, and the practical joking was stopped.

Frank could have sent a projectile down and blown the tiger into mincemeat with ease.

But another idea had come into his mind.

"Look here, White," he said, with a laugh. "You say that tiger has eaten up twelve of your people?"

"Yes."

"Well, how would you like him for a pet?"

The recluse was astounded.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"Just what I say."

"For a pet?"

"Yes."

"I am sure—I—that is, I can't understand your meaning."

"Well, supposing I catch that chap alive?"

"Alive?"

"Yes."

White indulged in a shiver.

"I fear you are joking!" he said.

"Am I!" exclaimed Frank, with a laugh. "I'll show you."

The young inventor went into the cabin and came out quickly with a long steel wire.

This was wound upon a spool very closely.

Frank began to unwind it and paid it out over the rail of the air-ship.

Down it went until it touched the ground.

Then Frank said:

"Go to the wheel, Pomp!"

The darky obeyed.

By Frank's orders he caused the Air Canoe to go forward until the wire had trailed along and come in contact with the tiger.

Such a light object as the wire did not disturb the beast more than a fly would.

He remained where he was lashing his tail.

"Hold the ship steady, Pomp!" cried Frank Reade, Jr.

Then into the battery room he sprang.

Quick as a flash he jammed the wire between two dynamos and set on the whole current.

It was vivid lightning which leaped over that wire.

The shock was sufficient to have prostrated a troop of horses.

The tiger with a stunning roar plunged forward and fell in a heap.

Frank, with insulating gloves, was handling the wire.

The tiger lay like one dead, but Frank, to make sure, gave him another shock.

Then he said to Pomp:

"Down with the air-ship!"

Down settled the Air Canoe until it rested on the ground.

Then Frank sprang over the rail and approached the tiger.

All this while Jasper White had been regarding the scene with amazement and mystery.

"I don't understand it," he muttered. "What mystery is it—what terrible power?"

"It is the power of the lightning stroke," said Frank, explanatively. "It is electricity, which man has learned to handle."

"Wonderful!"

Frank put his hand upon the tiger's form.

He felt the heart beat, and knew that the animal was alive.

But he held the charged wire in readiness to give another shock if necessary.

Before leaving the air-ship he had provided himself with some peculiar tools.

One of them was a powerful pair of shears, and another a huge pair of pincers or forceps.

Quickly he proceeded with the shears to cut off the sharp points of the tiger's claws.

The animal could make no resistance, being still unable to move.

In a short time Frank had robbed the monster of these weapons of offence, and next tackled the huge beast's teeth.

This was not such an easy matter, but with the aid of the heavy forceps, Frank extracted at least half of the tiger's powerful teeth when the animal began to come to.

Another shock with the wire, however, caused him to resign himself again to his fate.

Hurriedly and resolutely Frank worked. In a short while he finished his task.

The huge man-eating beast was without claws or teeth.

It seemed as if he was rendered wholly defenseless, but yet it was not forgotten that a tiger can deal a terrific blow with his heavy paws.

"Hors du combat!" cried Frank. "There, friend White, you may make a pet of your man-eater, if you wish!"

The recluse was quite overcome.

"Really, Mr. Reade," he said, in a confused way, "I never heard of a case like this in my life."

"All the better," cried Frank, gaily. "It's pleasant to know that one is the originator of a process."

"I never before heard of a tiger's teeth being pulled. We will take the beast and keep him in your remembrance."

The natives who had witnessed the operation were awestruck.

They regarded Frank as something of a deity.

Surely, a man who could pull a man-eating tiger's teeth with no other means of keeping the animal passive than a seemingly innocent wire, was no ordinary being.

Frank laughed well, as did Barney and Pomp.

But a muzzle was made of heavy straps and plaited ropes for the tiger, and his forward legs were hobbled.

In this manner the monarch of the jungle found himself when he recovered from the electrical shocks.

Slowly the tiger came to.

When the beast saw the crowd about it sprang up with a hideous roar.

Then followed a terrific struggle with the muzzle and hobble.

The result was that the natives, with yells of triumph snared the beast with ropes and dragged it back to the village.

The air-ship returned to the native village.

Frank had decided to remain there until the next day.

Accordingly preparations were made by the delighted Tanaguas for a grand fete in honor of their distinguished guests.

CHAPTER VI.

POMP SQUARES UP WITH BARNEY.

The native encampment was gay that night.

Watch fires were built, and the tom-tom was beaten loud and well.

The dancing maidens appeared again, and then came the warriors in grotesque dances.

It was all very interesting to the voyagers.

But Pomp said:

"Huh! I done fink we kin beat dat music all out. Eh, I'ish?"

"Begorra, it's roight ye are, naygur!" cried Barney.

Into the cabin they ran.

When they came out they had a banjo and fiddle.

Pomp was a skilled player on the former, and Barney on the latter.

Pomp waltzed into the center of the camp and began a lively clog upon his banjo.

Instantly the natives ceased their own discordant music.

They crowded about the two servitors, agog with interest.

"I'll give yez fust show, naygur!" cried Barney. "Do yer best!"

"A'right, sah!"

Pomp whirled the banjo into position, and began work.

He was an uncommon good player.

The way he rattled off the music there was thrilling.

He sang plantation medleys, song and dance, and many others.

The natives ecstatically applauded to the echo.

Then came Barney with his famous Irish fiddle.

The Celt played jigs and arias, and wound up by singing some very beautiful Irish airs.

The natives were scarcely less pleased by his performance.

They cheered him wildly, and wanted more.

But it was a late hour, and all felt called upon to retire.

The fete was ended for the night.

Guards were posted, and all were soon fast asleep.

The next day Frank decided to leave the Tanagua village at an early hour.

It was before sunrise.

Yet every native was on hand.

"Remember that you will always be welcome in Tanagua Land!" cried Jasper White, warmly. "You will never be forgotten."

"It is pleasant to know that," said Frank.

"By the way, Mr. Reade, are you traveling for pleasure?"

Frank gave a start.

"Ah, that makes me think!" he exclaimed. "I want to ask you, Mr. White, if you have ever heard of the Valley of Diamonds?"

"Why, certainly."

"Where is it located?"

"Far down in Brazil. Near the Rio Negro. I believe it is in Mazoota Land."

"Have you ever been there?"

"No."

"Is it difficult of access?"

"It always has been. The Mazootas are hard fighters, and always hostile. Then there is the Serpent Valley to pass through."

"Indeed!"

"You will be almost sure to be attacked by pythons in that valley."

"You don't mean it?"

"Yes; I do."

"Then you think we will have trouble?"

"Ah, I forgot," said White, with a low bow. "Of course, the Air Canoe can go anywhere."

"Is there any truth about the discovery of diamonds there?"

"It is all truth. The sands of the river are full of diamonds."

"Thank you for the information."

A short while later the air-ship took leave of Jasper White's settlement.

Straight to the southward now our voyagers bore.

To attempt an adequate description of that trip would be out of the question.

The country over which they passed was wonderful to view.

Vast forests of the most beautiful mahogany and other woods alternated with deep swamps and long reaches of level plain and lowland.

Rivers which were almost lakes in width were crossed.

The woods were filled with wild animals of all description.

Chattering monkeys peopled the tree tops, and birds of most brilliant plumage flew hither and thither.

Barney and Pomp never tired of watching the scene.

They were fond of trying shots at the game, also, which was plentiful.

Some wood deer were seen browsing in a clearing in the woods.

Barney conceived the idea of bagging one of them.

"Shure, it's quite fashionable now to have the antlers in yer ancestral hall, an' be jabers, I'm not goin' to be behind the toimes," declared the Celt.

"Huh!" grunted Pomp. "I jes' fink yo' wud hab hard wo'k fo' to find de hall."

"Be jabers, don't yez ridicule a gintleman!" cried Barney, with ire. "Shure, I'm a lineal descendant av the ould Irish kings, an' shure they had many an ancestral hall an' many a pair av deers' antlers to adorn it wid."

But Pomp was skeptical.

However, he ventured to make no further demur, and Barney drew a bead upon one of the deer and fired.

The shot was true.

The animal leaped into the air and fell dead.

"Whurroo!" cried Barney, triumphantly. "Shure, it's a foine shot I med. Wud yez luk at that, naygur. Shure, now, I'll have me antlers to pay fer it."

Pomp's eyes twinkled.

He had long been waiting for a chance to get square with Barney for the whitewash trick played upon him.

He believed that the chance was now offered.

He kept his own counsel, while Barney proceeded to lower the ship so that he might secure the antlers.

As it happened, Frank was asleep in the cabin.

This, Pomp believed, was an opportunity not to be despised of having a little fun.

Down settled the Air Canoe and rested upon the ground near the spot where lay the deer.

Barney, with hunting knife in hand, sprang to the rail.

In another moment he went over and started for the deer.

It required but a moment or two for him to rip off the deer's antlers.

Pomp in the meanwhile had not been idle.

He had sneaked into the cabin and brought a wire out.

This he hitched to the rail and connected with the dynamos.

The current thus was sent into the rail. Pomp was not foolish enough to give the full current.

It was a nice dose prepared for Barney.

The Celt had procured his antlers, and now started to return to the air-ship.

"Bégorra, wud yez luk at the loikes av thim!" he cried triumphantly, waving the antlers aloft.

"Dey am jes' fine, ain't dey, I'ish?" said Pomp.

"Yez kin bet on that, naygur."

"Wha' yo' do wid 'em?"

"Didn't I tell yez? Shure, I'll put them up over the door av me castle in ould Ireland."

"Yo' mean yo' shanty, I'ish."

"Whisht now, gossoon! I'd have yez undherstand that Barney O'Shea was niver born in a shanty."

Pomp looked incredulous.

But Barney now reached the rail and started to spring over it.

The next moment he was sorry for the attempt.

He placed his hand upon the iron and received the full force of the current.

It was simply tremendous.

He was hurled back like a puppet and lay upon the ground counting shooting stars.

"Ow-ouch! Divil take it!" he yelled, in agony. "Shure it's killed I am!"

But he was a good ways from being killed.

He recovered quickly and was upon his feet instantly.

He saw Pomp convulsed with mirth rolling about the deck.

"Ho, ho, ho!" laughed the dorky. "Dat am jes' paying yo' back fo' yo' treatment ob me, yo' big stuff. Dat am squar' wid de whitewash!"

A madder Irishman than Barney was never seen.

"Be me sowl, did yez play that thrick on me?" he yelled. "I'll av the scalp av yez for that!"

"Huh! Don' yo' fink yo'self so smaht, I'ish!"

"Begorra, ye'll see!"

Barney made a rush for the rail.

He cleared it at a bound and reached the deck.

There was no doubt but that he would have tackled Pomp roughly, but for an incident.

Frank Reade, Jr., appeared in the cabin door.

"What is all this?" cried the young inventor, sternly; "what do you mean by this kind of work?"

Barney and Pomp melted.

Pomp disconnected the wire, and Barney laid the antlers on the deck in mute explanation.

Frank was half tempted to smile, but instead, said firmly: "Don't ever dare to descend without my orders again. There is great risk in doing so."

"A'right, sah!" said Pomp, sneaking into the pilot-house.

The Air Canoe once more sprang aloft and continued on her journey.

As the days passed now they began to draw rapidly near that region where Frank believed that he would find the famous Valley of Diamonds.

One day with a glass he sighted a distant range of hills and made a startling statement.

"If I am right, yonder is the Valley of Pythons!" he declared, "and that beyond it is the Valley of Diamonds."

Barney and Pomp were at once all excitement.

Of course, they were eager to reach their destination, and the Air Canoe was put to full speed.

Soon they passed over a mighty deep gorge between rocky mountain heights, and entered a broad valley.

The Air Canoe thus far had performed the journey in rare good fashion.

Barney now, however, came up from the cabin, and said:

"Be jabers, Misther Frank, the wather is nigh out of the storage jars. Shure, wouldn't it be better to fill thim at wanst?"

"Why, of course!" cried the young inventor. "It must be done at once!"

An alarming cry came from Pomp at this moment.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE PYTHONS' VALLEY.

The cry given by Pomp was one of great alarm.

But it was not necessary for him to explain his alarm, for the cause was at once apparent to the others.

The Air Canoe had seemed to lose its headway and had begun to sink down to the earth.

"We are falling!" cried Frank. "What is the matter?"

He rushed into the dynamo room.

It was easy to see.

The dynamos did not work.

What was the trouble?

Frank guessed at once that it was on account of the empty storage jars.

However, no harm could be done if the Air Canoe did not strike the earth too hard.

But it seemed to settle gradually.

The rotascopes kept up sufficient motion to steady the ship.

Down went the aerial vessel and rested upon an open space of ground in the verge of a dense growth of trees.

Here the Air Canoe rested safe and secure.

With joy Frank saw a deep brook near, from which to get water to replenish the jars.

"Golly, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp, with wide, open eyes, "we'se jes' in good luck this time!"

"You are right!" agreed Frank. "But, come, there is work for us all to do, and we must get about it."

The two faithful servitors needed no urging.

A line of hose, connected with a force pump, was led to the waters of the brook.

But before water could be pumped, a series of most thrilling incidents occurred.

Barney was at the edge of the brook with the end of the hose.

Pomp was half way to the Air Canoe.

Barney thrust the end of the hose into the brook.

He was about to rise when he stepped upon what he thought was a long palmetto log.

The Celt's surprise was beyond expression when the supposed log yielded and suddenly became a squirming, live body.

A great brown body rose in the air and threw itself into mighty coils.

"Tare an' 'ounds!" shrieked the astounded and terrified Celt. "It's a shnake! Shure it's kilt I am. Help—help!"

Barney made a dive for the Air Canoe.

But the huge python, for such it was, threw out a coil and caught him.

In a trice Barney was lifted from his feet, felt his ribs cracking and saw the snake's huge jaws over him.

The poor fellow shrieked with terror and despair.

Pomp was so dazed and horrified that he could not act.

But at that opportune moment Frank came on deck.

He saw the situation.

At once he cried:

"Keep quiet, Barney. Don't try to make a move!"

The Celt heard Frank's voice.

"Save me, Misther Frank!" he cried. "Shure, it's the ind av me!"

"Have courage!" shouted Frank, and quick as a flash he threw his Winchester to his shoulder.

He knew that it was a fine shot, and that only a chance of very narrow kind would save the Celt.

But he did not hesitate to make it.

He aimed straight at the huge serpent's head.

Crack!

The bullet sped on its way.

Instantly the tables turned.

The ball struck the serpent's head and reduced it to a vulgar fraction.

There was a convulsive plunge and leap of the coils. Barney felt himself freer and sprang away.

But the headless coils of the snake went twisting away into a pile of bulrushes.

No sooner had it struck the bulrushes, however, when the clump seemed alive with twisting bodies.

Out into the open shot a huge python.

A second came close behind, and then a third.

Three of the monsters were in the open.

"Heavens!" gasped Frank, "I never saw such a den of snakes!"

Barney had just clambered aboard the Air Canoe.

Pomp had his rifle ready and drew aim upon one of the pythons.

"We are indeed in the Python Valley," cried Frank. "Did you ever see so many snakes before?"

"Look out, dar!" cried Pomp. "I'se jes' gwine to smash dat chap wif de yaller body."

Crack!

The darky's rifle spoke.

But his aim had not been as good as Frank's.

The bullet struck the python, but not its head.

The ball plowed into the reptile's body and made an ugly wound.

The huge serpent, fully forty feet in length, reared in the air, hissed savagely, and started for the Air Canoe.

The attack of the python was no light matter to our voyagers.

That huge glistening body weighed enormously, and was possessed of tremendous strength.

If it should strike the air-ship full tilt the effect might be serious.

All three of the explorers sprang for the cabin.

Rushing in they shut the door.

Frank barred it.

He well knew the danger.

If any of the pythons came aboard of the Air Canoe, there was no doubt but that a bloody battle must ensue.

Frank rushed to a port-hole and fired another shot at the oncoming snake.

But it did not check it.

On came the python like a veritable thunderbolt.

It struck the air-ship's rail with a shock which shook it from stem to stern.

All three of the inmates of the cabin were thrown from their feet.

Frank was at the porthole quickly, though, and fired point blank at the reptile.

The shot told.

The monster's backbone was disintegrated, and it lay upon the deck unable to move.

"Whurroo!" cried Barney. "Shure it's oursilves as kin lick the bastes!"

But Frank Reade, Jr., gave a gasping cry.

"My God!" he cried. "Will you see them come? How many of the reptiles are there, anyway?"

There was good cause for the young inventor's exclamation.

From the bulrushes, from a clump of trees near the mountain side and from a jungle near by, fully half a score of the pythons appeared. Some of them were of enormous size.

They seemed to have been attracted by the rifle shots.

The situation was a thrilling one.

"My soul!" gasped Frank, "there is no doubt but that we are in the Valley of the Pythons!"

He realized that Jasper White had not enlarged upon the truth.

The position of our voyagers was now a most serious one.

In order to leave the spot the storage jars must be replenished.

To do this it was necessary to procure water.

To get water one of them must venture from the cabin.

This it seemed most dangerous to do. What was to be done?

Frank realized that they were likely to be kept here an indefinite period.

A half-score of the monster pythons was no light obstacle for them to face.

To venture from the cabin seemed almost certain death.

But something had got to be done, and at once.

Time was rapidly slipping away, and darkness would soon be at hand.

In vain the young inventor tried to conjure up a plan.

The pythons came about the Air Canoe, hissing savagely, and seemingly longing to get at the inmates.

"I don't think we will venture out," said Frank, as if talking to the snakes. "By the way, Barney, did you place the end of the hose in the brook?"

"I did, yer kin bet," replied Barney.

"Then we ought to be able to get water," said Frank, brusquely.

The young inventor boldly risked a turn at the pump on deck.

Water came, and Frank caused several bucketsful to be carried into the cabin.

Some of the jars were filled.

But yet there was not enough of the subtle force to operate the Air Canoe's machinery.

Also by this time the pythons had seen Frank, and seemed disposed to attack him.

Frank was obliged to retire to the cabin again.

What was to be done?

It was useless to think of a wholesale slaughter of the snakes.

This would have been an undertaking of a gigantic sort.

Had it been a pack of wolves, or tigers even, it would not have been difficult to terrify them and drive them away.

But the snakes knew nothing of the word fear.

They came swarming about the Air Canoe in vast, squirming masses.

Several of them crawled across the deck.

Their tremendous weight made the joints of the aerial vessel creak and strain sorely.

"Be jabers, av yez cud get a chance, Mither Frank, it wud be a foine thing to give 'em the contints av the dynamite gun!"

"You're right, Barney," agreed Frank, "but I don't see the chance!"

"Shure, av we cud only git up enuff av a current, aither, we moight give thim a bit av a shock."

"You're right!" cried Frank. "I think we can generate enough by hand to do that."

"Begorra, let's thry it!"

"All right, Barney."

But before they could make a move to do this a loud cry came from Pomp.

"Oh, Marse Frank!" cried the darky. "Fo' de Lor' sakes wud yo' jes' come yar. Here am de funniest ting yo' ebber see!"

Frank Reade, Jr., lost no time in obeying.

He sprang to the loophole at which Pomp stood.

The darky gave way to him.

Frank gazed through the loop-hole and beheld one of the strangest sights he had ever seen in his life.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GORILLA.

It was truly a strange sight which the young inventor beheld.

The air was filled with a strange squealing noise.

The pythons seemed all in a state of unrest and excitement.

Those on the air-ship's deck glided off, and Frank was astounded to see some of them making for the cover of the jungle post-haste.

The explanation of this, however, was close at hand.

Into the clearing there had swung a vast herd of curious little animals.

They looked very much like pigs, but ran like squirrels over the ground.

Frank knew at once what they were.

He understood all.

They were peccaries.

These curious little animals are a terror in their way.

Woe to the luckless traveler or animal who gets in their path when once they start to run.

The peccary is of the swine family, and these are all known as the implacable enemy of the snake.

The huge pythons were no objects of terror to the peccaries.

No python was ever yet known to crush a peccary in its folds.

The little animals are too spry and agile, and have such fearful, razor-like tusks, that they would make mincemeat of a snake instant.

Frank Meade, Jr., knew this well.

So when he saw the peccaries coming he knew their siege was at an end.

Down into the clearing came the peccaries.

There seemed a thousand of them in the drove.

Nothing could stand before them.

Such of the pythons as stood their ground met a swift fate.

In less than two minutes after the peccaries had struck the snake scarcely a vestige of it could be seen anywhere.

With their fearful, sharp jaws they had torn the reptiles to pieces with the swiftness and ease of a mincemeat chopper.

Down through the glade went the flying peccaries.

In a twinkling they were out of sight.

But not a python was left on the scene.

The peccaries had cleaned them out completely. It had been a wonderful sight, and the spectators never forgot it.

"Whurroo!" cried Barney. "Did iver yez see the loikes av that? Shure thim little pigs are jist loike the koind that run wild in ould Ireland!"

"Easy, Barney!" said Frank, with a laugh; "but, come, let us get out of this infamous place."

"Dat am what I say, Marse Frank," cried Pomp.

The darky rushed out on deck and began work with the pump.

Barney joined him, and in a short while the jars were filled.

Soon the dynamos were once more working, and all was in readiness to start.

Frank lost no time.

He had no desire to stay longer in the valley of the pythons.

"The diamond valley next!" he cried.

The Air Canoe rose once more into the air. Down through the python valley went the air-ship.

Very soon the entrance to the valley beyond was reached.

It was a deep pass between high walls of stone.

The air-ship passed over it and hovered over the Valley of Diamonds.

At last the Mecca of their pilgrimage had been reached. The voyagers were eager to begin work.

There certainly was a large stream which flowed through the valley.

By other points Frank also recognized it as the spot for which they had been searching.

The young inventor viewed the scene with varied emotions.

"Indeed!" he exclaimed, "it is just such a spot as I should have imagined for a diamond mine."

"Begorra, it luks to me very much loike a howling wilderness," asserted Barney.

"Of course," agreed Frank; "but it is in just a wilderness that precious stones and minerals are found. Look at the Kimberley mines, for example."

Barney said no more.

Frank decided upon a spot to land, and the air-ship slowly settled down upon the earth.

It was a level spot not far from the stream.

This latter was quite a torrent, rushing down over rocks at a rapid rate.

"Now for work!" cried Frank, as he emerged from the cabin with a pickax and light spade. "Come, Barney and Pomp, let us see how true this story of the existence of diamonds is."

"All roight, sor," cried Barney.

Both followed Frank over the rail.

The Air Canoe was securely anchored.

There was little chance for it to get away, and the young inventor felt safe in leaving it.

The rail had been cleverly charged with electricity.

Any one venturing to clamber aboard would certainly meet with a hot reception.

Barney and Pomp now had the diamond fever fully as bad as Frank himself.

A few moments later they stood upon the bank of the stream.

Frank descended to the water's edge, and taking up a handful of the soil, began to examine it.

Evidently satisfied as to its character he began to dig into the bank.

Every little pebble was closely examined.

Suddenly Frank picked up what looked like an ordinary pebble.

He struck it sharply against the corner of his shovel.

The result was that the outer crust was displaced.

A brilliant light was disclosed, and in a flash Frank saw that he had discovered a beautiful specimen.

Of course it was impossible to judge as to its water yet.

This could only be determined after treatment by the lapidary.

"Golly, I jes' reckon I mus' be de nex' lucky man!" cried Pomp.

"Be jabers, ye'll have to worruk thin, naygur," cried Barney.

With this all fell to work in lusty fashion.

But the next half hour's digging brought no fruit.

It occurred to Frank as not a bad idea to change the locality.

Accordingly he started up with that purpose.

But as he glanced over the edge of the bank toward the Air Canoe he beheld a thrilling spectacle.

"Great Heavens!" he gasped, "what do you call that?"

"Phwat's that ye say?" cried Barney, starting up.

Truly it was a thrilling sight which met their gaze.

Crossing the open space between them and the Air Canoe was a creature of most extraordinary appearance.

It had the form of a human being, with tremendous proportions and huge, hairy body.

Its long arms reached to its knees, and it carried a heavy sapling in its right hand.

"A gorilla!" gasped Frank.

"Be jabbers, ye're roight!" cried Barney.

"Golly! I neber seed de likes ob dat afo' in all mah life!" cried Pomp, in utter amazement.

But Frank was considering their chances for reaching the Air Canoe.

They seemed to him very slight.

He knew that a collision with the gorilla was inevitable and must be no light affair.

Barney flung his rifle to his shoulder.

"Begorra, I'll sphile the beauty av him!" he cried.

But Frank put a hand on his rifle barrel.

"Hold on!" he cried, sternly.

"Howld on, is it, sor?" cried the astonished Celt. "An' shure, sor, phwy should I howld on?"

"It won't do to shoot."

"An' phwy not, sor?"

"Nothing would be gained by it. The creature's hide is too tough for a bullet at this distance!"

"Shure ye don't mane it?"

"Yes; I do."

Barney reluctantly lowered his rifle.

"Phwativer shall we do, Misther Frank?" he asked.

"Keep quiet for a while!" said Frank, with discernment.

"We may thank our lucky stars if we escape an attack by the brute."

Barney had no more to say.

Pomp all the while had been watching the creature with wonderment.

The gorilla seemed wrapped in astonished contemplation of the Air Canoe.

To its primitive mind the invention of civilized beings must have indeed been an object of wonderment.

The brute leaned upon its staff a moment contemplatively.

Then it uttered a frightful roar.

Whirling the stout sapling aloft he flung it with terrific force straight at the air-ship.

It struck the rail with such force as to be splintered in fragments.

"Begorra, wud yez luk at the muscle av the brute!" cried Barney. "Shure, he's as sthrong as an ox!"

"Strong!" cried Frank. "Why, I tell you the Brazilian gorilla can fell an elephant. The lion is no match for his powerful arms."

The gorilla, now evidently satisfied as to the non-offensive character of the air-ship, advanced toward it.

Frank now smiled.

If the brute should chance to come in contact with the rail it would be interesting to note the result.

The strongest man could not resist the electric current.

It was hardly likely that the gorilla could. But Frank watched with great interest.

The beast approached the Air Canoe cautiously.

Then slowly it reached up and grasped the rail.

The result was thrilling, as well as extremely comical.

For once in its life the gorilla encountered a force greater than its own.

As though it were but a puppet the huge brute was hurled back with such force that it turned a couple of somersaults.

A more astonished animal than that gorilla when it recovered itself was seldom seen.

In spite of the peril so close upon them, the voyagers could not refrain from a hearty laugh.

The gorilla heard it, and turning about saw Barney's head just above the river bank.

With a roar of wrath the beast started for him.

CHAPTER IX.

THE NATIVE VILLAGE.

The situation was now, to say the least, alarming.

Barney gave a yell and ducked his head.

"Och hone, the bloody baste is aafter us, Misther Frank!" he cried. "Shure, it's killed we'll all be!"

It was indeed a terrifying sight to see the huge monster bearing down upon them so savagely.

Barney was well justified in his terror.

He and Pomp crouched close beside Frank in abject terror.

But the young inventor was as cool as an icicle.

He drew back the hammer of his rifle, and said, sternly:

"Stop your foolishness! Be men, now! When I give the word, fire!"

This reassured the two servitors greatly, and they complied.

Truly the gorilla was a fearful object to look at.

The monster's jaws were reeking with blood and foam. Its eyes were staring wide with fury, and its long, powerful arms were fiercely beating the air.

Straight for the three men the huge gorilla made.

Should he reach them and get his grip upon them, it was doubtful if enough of their bodies could be found in a short time to make a funeral over.

Loud, snarling cries burst from the creature's mouth.

The next moment it was within a few yards of the edge of the bank.

It was a critical moment.

Now or never.

Frank Reade, Jr., drew aim and then cried, in a shaking voice:

"Now, boys, let him have it!"

Crack—ack!

The pieces blended in one explosion.

Every bullet went true to the mark. The monstrous beast's hide at that short range could not withstand the bullets from the deadly Winchesters.

The monster fell in a heap.

Death was instantaneous.

But the beast was not ten feet from Frank Reade, Jr.

It was a decidedly close call for the young inventor.

With a shiver Frank drew himself up. Barney let out a triumphant yell.

"Be jabbers, we spiled him that toime, fer shure!" he cried. "Shure, I thought we was all goners, be me sowl!"

"It was a close one," admitted Frank. "But a miss is as good as a mile."

"You'se jes' right, Marse Frank," agreed Pomp.

All now gathered around the mighty brute and surveyed him.

It was doubtful if human eyes had ever before beheld a larger specimen of the gorilla.

Now that the danger was over the spirits of all arose.

They would no doubt have returned to the diamond diggings but for an incident.

A sharp cry escaped from Frank Reade, Jr.

"Heavens, that looks squally!"

At that moment, from a clump of trees not one hundred yards distant, another gorilla had appeared.

He was scarcely inferior in size to the first.

To Frank's horror and amazement another appeared behind him.

In fact, in a few seconds half a dozen of the monsters appeared to view.

It was a thrilling situation.

To stay where they were was wholly out of the question.

To regain the air-ship was at once an instant necessity. There was certainly not a moment to lose.

The consequences could be easily foreseen should the gorillas chance to get there first.

There was no doubt but that they would tear the Air Canoe all to pieces.

Barney and Pomp saw this as well as Frank.

"Golly!" cried Pomp. "I done fink we don' want no part ob dem chaps."

"You're right!" cried Frank. "Break for the Canoe. Lose no time!"

The gorillas seeming to divine the fact that one of their number had been killed, uttered vengeful cries and came forward on the run.

Their strides were long and loping.

Had the distance been greater they would surely have overtaken the fugitives.

But as it was they reached the Canoe first.

Barney rushed into the pilot-house and threw the lever over.

Two of the gorillas reached the rail of the Air Canoe.

In throwing open the lever, Barney had also shut off the current which connected it with the rail.

So when the gorillas struck the rail they were not repelled but hung on grimly.

The air-ship leaped into space, and the gorillas were one hundred feet in the air clinging to the air-ship's rail in a twinkling.

Pomp, who saw the danger of their climbing aboard, seized a hatchet.

He rushed to the rail.

In another moment the gorillas would have drawn themselves aboard the air-ship.

But Pomp brought the hatchet mercilessly down upon their fingers.

With a shriek the two monsters relaxed their hold and went down like rockets to the earth.

All rushed to the rail to see the result.

They struck the earth in a heap and lay there.

It was safe to assume that they had been instantly killed.

Barney now checked the upward flight of the air-ship.

The Air Canoe now hung over the Valley of Diamonds, motionless.

They were fully a thousand feet from the earth.

What was to be done?

There was a perplexed look in Frank Reade, Jr.'s eyes.

"Begorra, I'm thinkin' they'll be afther havin' a hot reception fer us if we go down there agin," averred Barney.

The gorillas could be seen far below, stalking about and apparently in an excited state.

Surely it would not do to alight in that spot again.

And at this moment Frank Reade, Jr., detected a startling sight at the other end of the valley.

Seemingly elevated fully two hundred feet above the level of the valley he saw a vast body of water.

It was a broad lake, and the stream which coursed through the diamond valley seemed to be the overflow.

This was a matter of only transient interest, however.

Upon the shore of the lake there was a vast collection of native huts.

Indeed, it was the largest native settlement yet encountered, and well merited the name of city.

There were fully two thousand of the thatched huts.

The natives themselves could be seen lounging about or engaged in various occupations.

Frank was much surprised at this evidence of human life in the midst of such a fearfully wild region.

He, however, was inclined to make the acquaintance of these natives.

It occurred to him that he could make them of good service to him.

But a serious question arose.

Were they friendly?

This could only be determined by making a test.

Frank, therefore, decided to descend and make a parley.

"Be jabbers, how do we know but they're gorillas loike the others?" cried Barney.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Frank. "Go ahead the necessary distance and then lower the ship."

"All roight, sor."

Barney was never the one to disobey.

The Air Canoe was propelled forward the necessary distance and then suffered to descend.

Down it settled, and now the natives in the village saw it.

The effect was thrilling.

The greatest excitement seemed to take possession of them.

They could be seen rushing hither and thither in the wildest of confusion.

The appearance of the air-ship to them must have had a superstitious meaning.

"Begorra, we've scared the loife out av thim already!" cried Barney.

Frank appeared at the rail and held up his hands as a token of amity to the astonished and terrified natives.

The air-ship settled down upon a clear spot, and within a few yards of the village.

Frank did not fear attack, for he rightly counted upon the terror of the savages for protection.

The natives retreated to the cover of their huts, and for a time seemed afraid to come out.

Then by degrees their courage and confidence returned.

Frank ventured to descend from the Air Canoe's deck and went boldly among the huts.

He carried in his hands presents of various trinkets which he threw in at the hut doors.

In this way he succeeded in gaining his ends.

The natives, seeing that he was, after all, a human being, flesh and blood like themselves, gradually regained their confidence and came forth.

Soon they seemed to make a friendly acquaintance with the explorers.

Yet Frank could not say that he was favorably impressed with them.

They were giants in stature, with features of a repulsive type.

Their foreheads showed intellect of the lowest type, and their snaky, black eyes seemed to indicate a murderous temperament.

At least this was the impression received by the young inventor.

Succeeding events proved it to be wholly correct also.

Frank learned by sign talk that the savages regarded the Valley of Diamonds as a sacred valley.

They stood in deadly terror of the pythons and gorillas.

But it seemed that these never ventured upon the upper land, which was a most reassuring statement.

Frank also learned by sign talk that they were not the first white men who had visited the place.

The chief of the tribe led him to a row of tall stakes upon the top of each one of which there was a skull.

Moreover, it was the skull of a Caucasian, and there were fourteen of them.

Frank's fears were verified at once, and a thrill of horror seized him.

These natives were the very tribe of whom he had been told murdered the previous visitors, only one escaping to tell the tale.

CHAPTER X.

TREACHERY OF THE NATIVES.

The effect of this discovery upon the young inventor may well be imagined.

His first inclination was to turn about and visit vengeance upon the assassins.

This he could easily have done with his dynamite gun.

But upon second thought he refrained from so doing.

And then he committed a breach of good judgment.

Thinking to impress the wretches with the power of his invention, he took four of the rascals aboard the air-ship.

It was a great mistake.

Their keen eyes and shrewd natures took in everything.

The electric current, which Frank exhibited to them, was in their estimation but a trick.

They considered the voyagers as no more than they were themselves—human beings—and the cupidity of the savage was aroused at once.

Right then and there the determination seized them to take possession of the Air Canoe.

Frank never committed a greater breach of discretion in his life.

He saw it when too late.

The first and natural trick of the designing savages was to profess friendship.

They came around the air-ship in a friendly manner, and Barney and Pomp bartered articles with them for small diamonds which the natives declared came from the sacred valley.

Of course our adventurers were only too glad of the opportunity to procure the precious stones so cheaply.

But they did not dream of the crash so near at hand.

For two days the voyagers remained at the native village.

Then Frank began to think of paying a visit again to the diamond valley.

The chief assured him that the diamonds were to be procured nowhere else.

Then he took Frank to the outlet of the lake.

Here a startling sight was revealed.

A long, natural flume led down into the valley.

At its upper end, what seemed like a precarious collection, served alone to hold back the waters of the lake.

The chief grinned when Frank remarked this.

The savages seemed eager enough to engage in the pursuit of diamond hunting at this upper end of the valley.

The other end was where the gorillas were to be encountered, and nothing would induce them to go there.

Frank considered this all natural enough, and did not demur.

Arrangements were made to begin work the next day.

Early the next morning Frank saw the chief and a dozen of the natives approaching.

They came boldly onto the air-ship's deck.

Frank was surprised at this action.

Barney was in the cabin and Pomp was on the forward deck.

The chief made signs as if to speak with Frank.

The young inventor drew near.

Quick as a flash the chief made a sign to his men, and they were upon Frank like human wolves.

The young inventor was crushed to the deck instantly.

In a flash of time he was a prisoner in the power of the natives.

A sensation of horror swept over him.

Too late he saw his folly.

Pomp was overtaken the next moment by the natives.

He was also overpowered.

But Barney had seen the danger just in time and was quick to act.

He darted into the cabin and closed the door behind him.

There was a bolt which he shot into place.

The natives dashed their weight against it, but in vain.

The windows were iron-barred, and they could not enter that way.

Barney was safe.

"Begorra, Misther Frank!" he cried, "phwativer shall I do? If I come out to help ye, they'll grab me, too!"

"Turn the lever, Barney!" cried Frank, with quick thought.

Swift as a flash Barney complied.

It was certainly the best move under the circumstances.

He turned the lever.

With a great whirl and rush the rotascopes began to revolve, and up shot the Air Canoe.

Up like a flash, and in a twinkling the earth was a thousand feet below.

The effect upon the natives was just what might have been expected.

The sensation was a new and startling one to them.

They became seized with a panic, and rushed to the rail.

Frank and Pomp were both left free and uninjured.

Barney flung open the cabin door, and both rushed in.

The natives meanwhile were clutching the rail with chattering teeth and wildest terror.

"Begorra, we fooled the spalpeens that toime!" cried Barney.

"You're right!" agreed Frank, "but it was a close call!"

"It was that, sor! Shure, phwat will be the next move I'd loike to know?"

"I jes' fink I would dump de rascals overb'd," cried Pomp.

But Frank was of a more humane turn of mind.

Despite the fact that they had meant to take his life, he could not bear the idea of such wholesale slaughter.

"No," he said, finally. "I have something better!"

"Shure, I don't see how there kin be anythin' better," said Barney.

"Well, you will see it!" said Frank, curtly.

"Devil a bit, sor!"

Frank went into the pilot-house.

He lowered the Air Canoe until it hung over the diamond valley.

Then he let the ship down until within a dozen feet of the ground where the dead gorillas lay.

The woods were now seen to be full of the live gorillas, and with savage cries they now rushed toward the air-ship.

The natives had been constrained to leap overboard.

But now they paused in warrantable terror.

There was certainly good cause.

Frank threw open the door of the cabin and motioned to them to leap.

But they still clung to the rail in abject terror.

"Be me sowl, they don't loike the medicine at all, at all!" cried Barney.

"I don't fink dey does," said Pomp.

"I'll fix them!" gritted Frank.

He turned a lever, which sent the full force of the current into the rail.

The effect was laughable as well as tragical.

The savages were hurled over the rail like puppets.

Striking the ground they regained their feet and rushed away like frightened deer.

But the gorillas were about them.

Frank raised the Air Canoe fifty feet and watched the scene.

It was a thrilling one.

The savages were hemmed in upon all sides but one.

This was the swift current of the river.

In their desperation they started for it.

But three of them reached it.

The others were overtaken by the gorillas and instantly struck dead, their bodies being carried away into the forest.

Three of the savages swam the stream and escaped.

Barney was itching to pick them off with his Winchester, but Frank said:

"Give them their lives. They have well earned liberty."

To resume intercourse with the villagers was now out of the question.

What was to be done?

"Upon my word!" exclaimed Frank, "I don't wonder that the wealth in this valley has never been carried away. Its dangers are legion."

There seemed no other way but to wage a war of extermination against the gorillas.

This would be no light task.

Frank reckoned that there were hundreds of them in the woods and caves about.

Somehow there was something positively sickening about killing the brutes, they so strongly resembled a human being.

But Frank had nigh made up his mind to begin the battle when he caught sight of a thrilling object.

From the direction of the upper end of the valley dense clouds of smoke were arising.

What did it mean?

It was certainly fire.

"What on earth is it?" cried the young inventor.

"Begorra, it's a foire!" vouchsafed Barney, explicitly.

"Yes; but what is burning?"

"Shure, it'll not take yez long fer to foind out."

"You're right."

Frank sprang into the cabin and turned the rotascope lever.

The Air Canoe shot up higher.

Then the full explanation was easy to be seen.

The whole native village was in flames. It was a tremendous conflagration.

"They are burning up!" cried Frank. "What does it mean?"

"Shure, Misther Frank, let us take a luk in at thim an' see."

"All right."

Frank started the Air Canoe ahead.

In a very few moments a full explanation was accorded the voyagers.

A battle was in progress upon the lake shore.

The natives had been surprised and attacked by a war party of the deadly Mazootas, as Frank guessed them to be.

It was certainly a savage battle in progress there.

The Air Canoe hung over the scene.

Its appearance, however, did not check the conflict.

Indeed, the participants seemed to fight harder than ever. The advantage seemed upon the Mazootas' side.

"On me worrud, Oi think it's the bist thing we kin do is to let thim ate each other up av they will," cried Barney.

"You're right," agreed Frank. "We will not mix in the fray."

It would have been easy for Frank with the electric gun to have decided the contest for either side.

But, as he had declared, he had no preference. It was a matter of little interest to him which side won.

The Mazootas were avowed enemies to the whites.

So that really it was of little concern to the voyagers. If both bands were extinguished it would be the very best thing that could be done.

But it was indeed exciting to witness the battle, which was a hot one.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FLOOD.

The Mazootas certainly seemed to be the best fighters.

They forced their enemies back to the very verge of the diamond valley.

The descent here was a steep one, and if they were forced over it the loss of life would be large.

The natives fought desperately.

But they had not their chief with them to direct them.

He had fallen a victim to the vengeance of the gorillas.

Hotter waxed the fight.

Finally, the natives were driven down into the sacred valley.

Here they made a bold stand, and aided by some uneven ground, held the Mazootas at bay.

But the latter did not seem to press the fight so hard now.

Indeed, their purpose was a far deeper one and meant the extermination of the foe at one fell blow.

How they brought this about was quickly seen.

A number of them rushed to the head of the flume.

It seemed that it was a well-known fact to the natives that but one log kept the lake back from flooding the valley.

The parting of this single log would allow the debris to fall, and the lake would leap from its imprisonment.

Even Frank Reade, Jr., had not discovered that fact.

But the Mazootas had got hold of it in some way.

Frank saw their purpose when it was too late to prevent it.

If he could have prevented it he would certainly have done so, for many important reasons.

The most important was the fact that the valley would be so flooded that it would be out of the question to even work the diamond diggings.

But it was too late.

"My soul!" cried Frank. "It is good-by to our diamonds, now!"

Barney and Pomp uttered a great cry.

Then a loud and sullen roar rose upon the air.

The Mazootas had liberated the lake, and it was on its fearful way down the flume.

The natives in the valley realized this, and ran shrieking for the heights.

But they never reached them.

Down into the Valley of Diamonds surged the tremendous avalanche of water.

In a resistless volume it raced to the farthest end.

There was no outlet there.

The lake was held imprisoned.

It had merely exchanged one bed for another.

The two miles of wild valley was in less than fifteen minutes transformed into a mighty body of water.

Buried now forever were the treasures of the diamond valley.

Nobody would ever know just what treasures were buried there, or what was the real worth of the diggings.

Our adventurers gazed spellbound upon the impressive scene.

The Mazootas were holding orgies upon the ruins of their foes' village.

"Our quest is ended!" cried Frank, with a shade of disappointment in his voice. "The diamond valley and its wealth is buried forever."

"Golly, dat am a sittin' fac'!" cried Pomp. "But look yonder."

The darky pointed to the dry bed of the lake.

"Don' yo' s'pose dar am diamonds to be found dar?" he asked.

"Be jabers, mebbe the naygur is right," said Barney, scratching his head.

But Frank looked incredulous.

However, he said:

"Well, we will take a look about and see. But the first thing is to rid ourselves of those fiends below."

The young inventor went forward and thrust a dynamite cartridge into the pneumatic gun.

He was just in the mood to give the barbarian Mazootas a good lesson.

He inclined the muzzle of the gun downward and drew back the air-valve.

Down went the projectile with lightning speed.

It struck the center of a group of barbarians.

In a flash the air was filled with debris, and in mad terror the band of looters fled incontinently.

Another projectile sent after them effectually warned them away.

Then Frank allowed the Air Canoe to settle down over the surface of the lake bed.

In places the water yet stood in pools.

But there were wide stretches of sand and gravel.

Upon one of these Frank allowed the Air Canoe to rest.

Then preparations were made for exploring the bed of the lake.

Frank was descending the gang-ladder, when suddenly a glittering object in the sand attracted his attention.

It was so dazzling in its radiance that a great cry escaped his lips.

"My soul! Here is a diamond the first thing. What a beauty."

Out of the sand Frank picked a diamond fully the size of his thumbnail.

It was a magnificent stone, and worth many thousand dollars.

The young inventor was delighted.

"Hurrah!" he cried. "Perhaps we have exchanged old diggings for new and better ones."

Barney and Pomp viewed the stone with admiration and wonderment.

Then the Celt exclaimed:

"On me worrud, Barney O'Shea, ye're not smart, or ye'll foind the mate to that."

"I hope you may!" laughed Frank.

Then the search began.

But, strange to say it proved a futile one.

For two days the diamond hunters remained in the bed of the lake.

But not even the smallest kind of a precious stone was found.

Finally, they abandoned the quest in despair.

"Is it possible!" cried Frank Reade, Jr., in dismay. "Is this the only stone we are to find?"

"It luks that way, sor!" said Barney.

"I done fink dat de water hab covered up de mos' valuable ob de diamonds!" cried Pomp. "We'se not in it!"

"Phwat's that—the wather?" interrogated roguish Barney.

"Shut up, yo' good fo' nuffin I'ishman! Don' yo' gib me no sass!"

There might have followed a ruction for this, but a stern look from Frank stopped it.

"We have no time for fooling," he declared. "Let us make one more search, and then if not successful we will leave here."

"A'right, sah," agreed Pomp.

Indeed, Frank was in earnest, and very shortly they would have been sailing away on a new course had not a peculiar accident happened to Barney.

Suddenly a loud shriek of alarm was heard.

Frank and Pomp both turning beheld a startling sight.

There, up to his neck in a muck hole, was Barney.

Indeed, it looked as if he would surely disappear from sight altogether.

Of course, it was a dangerous position.

There was great danger that the muck might suffocate him, and Frank knew this well.

Frank picked up the long-handled rake with which he had been raking the sand.

"Hold on, Barney!" he cried. "I am coming!"

In spite of his peril the Irishman's wit did not forsake him.

"Shure, phwativer will I howld on to, sor?" he cried.

But Frank threw the rake handle across the muck hole, and cried:

"Throw your arms across that!"

Barney quickly obeyed.

This did support him, and right well, too. Pomp went back to the Air Canoe for a rope.

This was brought and fastened under Barney's arms, and he was pulled out of the hole.

But he was indeed a comical-looking sight.

From head to foot he was nothing but one mass of slime and mud.

It required some time and work for the Celt to clean himself up.

When he had at length succeeded, Pomp and Frank returned from a fruitless quest, and the latter said:

"It is of no use. We will leave this spot at once!"

But it was decided first to make a journey around the Valley of Diamonds, now occupied by the lake.

Barney and Frank performed this feat, Pomp remaining behind to guard the Air Canoe.

The two explorers met with a number of thrilling experiences.

Once they resisted an attack by a number of prowling Mazootas.

At another time they narrowly escaped an encounter with a gorilla, probably one of the survivors of the flood.

Frank looked in vain for some trace of diamonds.

But he was not successful.

The auriferous soil in which they are usually found seemed to have been wholly confined to the flooded valley.

"It's of no use," Frank finally concluded. "Fate has snatched the treasure from our grasp."

Yet he could not feel that the quest had been a bootless one.

The big diamond he had found in the lake was a small Kohinoor for brilliancy and value.

They had quite a number of others of medium quality, obtained from the natives.

Frank decided at once to leave the region of the diamond valley.

"It is a fated locality," he declared. "See what a horrible scene the lake has covered up. A whole tribe swept away in a moment of time."

When Frank made up his mind to do a thing, he rarely lost time in execution.

"Shure, sor, is it home we'll go from here?" asked Barney.

"No," replied Frank.

"Where thin, sor?"

"The Rio Negro is not far from here. I think we will strike that and follow it down to the Amazon. From there to Ria Janeiro, a trip up the coast and then home."

Barney and Pomp were delighted with this decision.

They had not as yet seen enough of Brazil, and were anxious for new adventures.

Their desires were destined to be gratified before many days.

Thrilling adventures were at hand.

The air-ship left the diamond valley the next day, and thus ended the quest for the great wealth there buried.

But we will not take leave of our adventurers for another chapter, in which will be detailed the dire calamities and the great perils which overtook them before they reached the mouth of the Amazon.

CHAPTER XII.

DOWN THE AMAZON—A CATASTROPHE.

The Air Canoe set out upon its course down the Rio Negro.

Many wonderful sights were seen as the Air Canoe continued on its way.

Vast forests of dyewoods were passed over, of mahogany and rosewood, of oak and cypress.

Jungles and swamps intervaled, and uplands came in turn; and mighty chains of lakes and wide, sluggish rivers added to the variety of the scene.

The voyagers never tired of watching it all.

What mattered it to them if the jungle beneath was the haunt of the savage tiger, the poisonous serpent or other deadly beasts and reptiles?

They were secure on the deck of the air-ship, and could laugh to scorn any of these mighty perils.

For some days the course of the Rio Negro was followed.

Frank was much averse to traveling at night, so, when darkness approached, he generally managed to find a good spot to descend and camp.

Many rare and curious things were secured at such times.

Barney had secured a handsome white monkey, and Pomp had a collection of beautifully plumaged birds.

Sometimes at night the wolves would come howling about the air-ship.

But our adventurers were always secure in the cabin.

Occasionally Barney or Pomp would be tempted to give them a shot, which would make them scatter.

Thus the travelers kept on until the conjunction of the Rio Negro with the Amazon was reached.

And now they beheld before them a region which was not by any means in comparison with that left behind.

The swamps were ten times thicker, the jungles larger, the forests darker.

For two days they followed the course of the mighty river.

It gradually grew broader, and in places was only to be compared with a vast inland sea.

But the third day after reaching the Amazon the water tanks gave signs of giving out.

Frank decided to descend upon a sort of wooded peninsula, which jutted out into the river.

The place seemed free from wild beasts, and well situated for a stopping place.

The air-ship descended and rested upon a clear spot.

Near by were several massive mahogany trees.

It was in the latter part of the afternoon, and as it seemed such an admirable place to stop, Frank decided to camp.

At once Barney made a fire, and Pomp going a little way into the woods, shot an antelope.

But the darky upon the return to camp crossed a well-beaten path.

It might have been made by wild beasts on their way to a watering place.

But a deadly fear struck the darky.

He reckoned, and not without reason, that the path had been made by human beings.

"Golly!" he muttered, "I jes' fink I tell Marse Frank 'bout dat, fo' mebbe he would like to know."

So Pomp did so.

Frank listened with surprise.

"Why, that is queer!" he exclaimed. "I would take my oath that we are miles from any native settlement."

Frank was in deep thought for a few minutes.

However, taking his rifle, Frank went back to examine the path.

He gave a start at first sight of it.

He followed it carefully into the woods for some ways.

Suddenly he came to a little woodland stream.

In the soft soil upon its bank he saw the imprint of a foot.

It was the bare footprint of a human being.

All doubt was settled.

Frank started to go back to the camp. But he had not proceeded far when a thrilling incident occurred.

He was passing a copse, when he heard a strange rustling sound which set his nerves tingling.

It was not the first time he had heard that sound.

Well he knew what was the cause of it.

He saw the flash of two diamond-like eyes in the brush, and made quick action.

He slung his rifle over his shoulder, and grasping the branches of a tree drew himself up among them.

The occupant of the copse was a huge python.

Frank knew the futility of trying to beat a retreat.

Or even to remain upon the ground.

Should the terrible coils of the python once envelop him he knew well his fate would be sealed.

There was but one hope, and this was to escape them.

He knew that by climbing the tree the python would be taken at a disadvantage, for the huge snakes are not good tree climbers.

At about twenty feet from the ground Frank halted.

He unslung his rifle and watched his foe warily.

But to his astonishment the monster did not attack him.

To the contrary, it gave a prodigious hiss, and lunging out of the copse started away like the wind.

The speed of the monster was something frightful.

Frank felt the wind of its huge, brown body as it swept under the tree beneath him.

Straight toward the location of the Air Canoe went the monster.

Frank shivered for Barney and Pomp.

Would they escape the monster?

He fired a shot after the python.

But this was intended more as a warning for Barney and Pomp.

Then the young inventor leaped down out of the tree.

He knew that there was need for immediate action.

He did not hesitate a moment.

Away in pursuit after the python he ran.

A few moments later he heard the report of rifles and a terrible commotion.

"My soul!" he gasped, "the monster has reached the Air Canoe!"

And he ran faster.

Now he came in sight of the camp. The scene there was a thrilling one, and nearly paralyzed Frank with horror.

"My God!" he groaned, "I fear that is the end of Pomp!"

The monster python had the darky in its terrible coils.

Barney lay half insensible upon the ground near.

Pomp was cutting and slashing away with his knife with all his strength.

The blood was spurting in actual torrents from the python's body.

But the snake's folds were drawing tighter, and it was striking Pomp with its head with such force as to nigh knock the breath out of him.

Frank saw that a moment's delay would be fatal to Pomp. Quick as a flash he raised his rifle.

The snake's head was reared high in the air ready to deal Pomp another blow.

Frank took aim.

The rifle spoke sharply.

A great cry of joy welled from Frank's throat as he saw the effect.

The bullet went true to the mark.

It struck the snake's head and spattered its brains.

It seemed as if Pomp was saved.

But the mighty reptile's coils in the death agony did not seem to relax about Pomp's form.

More than that, the snake went plunging and twisting toward the river. The next moment into the water it went, and Pomp also.

Frank gave a cry of horror as he saw Pomp disappear beneath the waves.

"My God, he is lost!" he cried.

But this was not so.

The darky came to the surface like a cork, and striking out, none the worse, swam ashore.

Barney by this time had recovered himself.

"Be jabers, phwat happened to me?" he gasped, in astonishment. "Phwat put yez into the wather, naygur?"

Then Barney saw the body of the snake still squirming in the current, and he understood all.

"On me sowl!" he cried, "I niver had sich a froight afore in me loife. Divil take the riptile!"

"Golly," I done fought mah las' day had come!" cried Pomp. "Marse Frank, dat was a great shot ob yours!"

"It was a miracle!" exclaimed Frank, fervently. "I think the best thing we can do is to leave this place at once."

But the words had not left his lips when an astonishing thing happened.

A distant wild yell was heard and a flight of arrows came tumbling about them.

"Jiminy!" gasped Pomp. "Whatebber was dat?"

But the question was answered as they gazed out upon the river's surface.

From a clump of reeds a war canoe shot out.

It held fully a score of armed natives.

They began discharging arrows and yelling.

Frank saw that action must be made at once.

"We've got to get out of here!" he cried. "This is a little too uncomfortable."

"Be jabbers, that's roight," cried Barney.

All started for the Air Canoe.

But at that moment a cry of terror burst from Pomp's lips.

"Fo' de Lor', Marse Frank, would yo' jes' listen to de likes ob dat!"

But Frank had heard the sound.

From the distance through the trees came a queer moaning sound.

Then across the water there shot feathery gusts of wind.

Great, deep shadows came creeping through the forest.

The sky grew yellow and dark.

The savages had ceased their yelling and were paddling madly for the reeds.

Frank Reade, Jr., knew well what was coming.

He knew full well the awful character of the Brazilian tornado, and how it mowed everything down in its path.

"Quick!" he shouted. "On deck! Throw out the anchors. Lash the air-ship securely, or we are lost!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END.

The tornado was close at hand, and there was no time to lose.

Barney and Pomp rushed to the anchor ropes.

But they were barely able to throw them out when the storm broke.

With all haste the three adventurers rushed into the cabin.

The din was now tremendous.

Rain was swept in torrents through the air, flying debris, sticks, stones and other material, and the boughs of trees.

The hurricane churned the waters of the river into billows like those of the sea.

A literal path was mowed through the forest.

Frank was in the pilot-house trying to see out of the windows.

He feared every moment that the Air Canoe would be lifted bodily and blown into the river.

The force of the wind was something frightful.

Suddenly there was a wrenching and twisting and a whirling of the rotascope shafts.

Frank experienced a chill of horror.

One of them had been demolished and swept away by the tornado.

The next moment another went the same way.

"My God!" gasped the young inventor. "We are lost!"

Without the rotascopes of course the Air Canoe could not sail.

They were cast away, as it were, in the very heart of the South American wilds, peopled with a million perils.

Without a boat or any other means of travel they had not the slightest chance of ever reaching civilization.

But the worst was yet to come.

Suddenly above the thunder of the tornado there came a tremendous, resounding crash.

The Air Canoe's deck gave in, there was a terrific grinding and crushing, shaking, jolting and jarring.

The voyagers were thrown flat upon their faces.

But in that supreme moment the tornado spent its force.

It was gone as quick as it had come.

The three victims of the catastrophe crawled out of the wreck of the Air Canoe.

It was a pitiable sight.

Every rotascope was gone, as was the propeller.

The whole after part of the aerial vessel had been crushed in by the weight of a falling tree.

The Air Canoe could never be redeemed.

Repairing or reconstruction was wholly out of the question.

Frank Reade, Jr., stood for some time sorrowfully viewing the wreck of his wonderful invention.

"That is hard luck!" he declared. "The fates are against us."

"Shure, it's the ind av us!" wailed Barney. "Arrah, an' I'd niver loike to die in this out-av-the-way part av the worruld, an' niver a sowl to mourn fer ye!"

Pomp was equally as much affected.

But Frank Reade, Jr., was possessed of a lion's courage. He set his lips firmly.

"Never mind!" he gritted. "We'll pull out of this scrape yet."

Then he set to work directing the building of a raft.

For four days all worked like beavers.

At the end of that time the raft was finished.

On this Frank hoped to float down to some civilized settlement.

It was the dernier ressort, the forlorn hope of the castaways.

The raft was well fitted up with stuff from the wrecked air-ship.

Provisions and ammunition were placed on board.

Frank took all of his scientific instruments and all else of value that he could.

Then the voyagers set forth upon the broad bosom of the Amazon.

They had made long sweeps with which to propel the raft.

For two days they progressed slowly down the river.

But the tropical sun was broiling hot, and the nights damp and misty. The spirits of all were depressed.

It seemed an interminable distance to cover. A kinder fate, however, now waited upon them.

Fifty miles further down the river they were picked up by an exploring steamer owned by a Spanish planter.

They were kindly received by the Spaniards, and six

weeks later were landed at Para. From there a steamer was taken for New York.

Crowds flocked to see the returned voyagers.

People in Readestown were delighted to welcome them back, and sorry to learn of the loss of the Air Canoe.

But Frank Reade, Jr., said:

"Never mind. The Air Canoe is gone, but I'll construct an airship that shall excel all my past efforts."

The young inventor kept his word.

What the next air-ship was like, and the adventures experienced with it will be told to the reader in due form in a future number of this library.

THE END.

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